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IZ, GM

SUBJECT: GERMAN VIEWS ON NOVEMBER 3 GYMnich AND NOVEMBER
10-11 GAERC MEETINGS

REF: STATE 115017

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Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JEFF RATHKE. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) In addition to transatlantic relations, EU foreign ministers are expected to use their November 3 informal "Gymnich" lunch in Marseille to discuss options for EU support of the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, including the possibility of deploying an EU battlegroup. Germany has made no secret of its displeasure over French FM Kouchner's public call for such a deployment. On Russia/Georgia, Germany agrees on the need for Russia to abide by its commitments on withdrawing forces, but continues to believe that "sufficient progress" has been made for the EU to resume PCA negotiations with Moscow. While agreeing that now is not the right time to discuss the Medvedev Security Treaty proposal, Germany is open to doing so sometime in the future. The German government is set to seek a Bundestag mandate for German naval participation in the EU anti-piracy mission as soon as the decision is made at the November 10-11 GAERC. On Iran, Germany supports targeted measures against specific companies and industries, but is critical of the USG's call for taking broader action, saying that deeming the entire Iranian banking system as "bad" would introduce a total trade embargo "through the back door." While Germany favors engagement with Syria, it does not anticipate an EU consensus for signing the EU-Syrian Association Agreement in the near future. On the Middle East, Germany cautiously favors a larger EU role, but notes that ambitious plans by the French Presidency could run into resistance from other EU members. END SUMMARY.

INTERLOCUTORS

12. (U) Poloffs delivered reftel points to MFA Deputy European Correspondent Thomas Schieb, Iran Unit Chief Andreas Krueger, Middle East Task Force Coordinator Robert Doelger, Syria/Lebanon Desk Officer Stefan Bantle and Near East Desk Officer Sybille Sorg.

CONGO

13. (C) MFA Deputy European Correspondent Schieb said that Germany was "not happy" with French FM Kouchner's public call for the deployment of an EU battlegroup to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and was "extremely pessimistic" about the merits of the proposal. Schieb said German military experts had doubts that an EU force of 1,500 soldiers would really be able to make a difference, especially given that there were already 17,000 UN soldiers on the ground there. Even if the EU deployment helped stabilize the situation, it was questionable whether this would be sustainable after EU forces left. Schieb also noted that HiRep Solana had reacted coolly to the idea, stressing the need for diplomatic efforts rather than more troops.

14. (C) Schieb confirmed that the issue would be the subject of a special EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) meeting today (October 31) in Brussels. He said that the Council Secretariat had prepared two papers to help inform the discussion -- one providing a political analysis of the situation and the other outlining options, including deployment of an EU force in support of the UN mission (MONUC). The issue will then be taken up by foreign ministers at their informal "Gymnich" lunch meeting November 3 in Marseille.

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

15. (C) Schieb said that the discussion of transatlantic relations at the November 3 Gymnich meeting will focus on the top issues on which the EU plans to engage the new U.S. Administration, particularly the Middle East, Afghanistan/Pakistan and Russia. Schieb said that while some internal papers have been prepared to help inform the discussion, the EU did not plan to prepare a document that would be shared with the U.S. as part of this process.

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RUSSIA

16. (C) Schieb said Germany was looking forward to a paper being prepared by the EU Commission and Council Secretariat on relations with Russia, which was scheduled to be distributed to member states on November 5. This paper would help inform the discussion of next steps regarding Russia at the November 10-11 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). While agreeing with all the U.S. points about the need for Russia to fully abide by its commitments in the August 12 and September 8 agreements regarding the withdrawal of forces from Georgia, Schieb said Germany continued to believe that "sufficient progress" has been made to resume negotiations on an updated EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). He argued that the EU has as much, if not more, interest in the PCA than Russia. He also said the PCA negotiations themselves would offer the EU an opportunity to press its key talking points, including the need for Russian forces to withdraw to their pre-August 7 positions. Schieb acknowledged, however, that Germany was getting "signals" from other EU members that restarting the PCA negotiations was "out of the question" for now.

MEDVEDEV SECURITY TREATY PROPOSAL

17. (C) Schieb said Germany agreed it would be a "bad idea" to discuss the Medvedev proposal now, given the situation in Georgia. However, in general, Germany supported keeping the lines of communication open and engaging the Russians. Germany would not want to rule out discussing the Medvedev proposal sometime in the future. Schieb noted that HiRep Solana had taken the same approach in his October 30 speech on EU common foreign and security policy in Paris. (Note: In discussing re-engagement with Russia, Solana advocated beginning with the arms control and disarmament agenda, but added that "another possibility, perhaps for a later stage, is Medvedev's plan for a European Security Treaty." End Note.)

EU ANTI-PIRACY MISSION

18. (C) Schieb expressed appreciation for U.S. support for the planned EU anti-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia and agreed that cooperation and coordination with NATO on this issue appeared to be going well. He confirmed that the November 10-11 GAERC was scheduled to formally approve the mission, which would be launched in December. Schieb said the EU decision would allow the German government to go forward in seeking the necessary Bundestag mandate to authorize the German navy to participate in the mission.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

19. (C) Schieb pointed out that FM Steinmeier is very engaged on the Afghanistan/Pakistan issue, having just visited Islamabad this past week to meet with President Zadari and FM Qureshi, and then traveling on to Saudi Arabia and the UAE to seek their help in providing urgent financial assistance to Pakistan. Schieb said that Germany found the idea of the Frontier Trust Fund for Pakistan interesting, but would need further details before it could start contributing.

IRAQ

110. (C) Schieb confirmed that Iraq would be on the agenda of the November 10-11 GAERC, but said no discussion was envisaged. Instead, the ministers are expected to approve Council conclusions calling for beefing up the current EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission (EUJUST LEX) and looking at the possibility of doing some EUJUST LEX activities within Iraq itself.

IRAN

111. (C) MFA Iran Unit Chief Krueger was critical of the USG's call for taking action beyond targeting specific banks, saying that deeming the entire Iranian banking system as "bad" would introduce a total trade embargo "through the back door." International consensus on implementing a total trade

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embargo does not and will not exist in the foreseeable future, he said; as long as the political commitment to such an embargo does not exist, banks will be necessary to conduct legal trade.

112. (C) On a more general note, he said that Germany is looking towards more specific targeting of companies and industries and wants to propose such targeting to all EU member states, and has consulted with France and Italy on how to introduce this; Germany is now waiting for the French Presidency to introduce this proposal to the other Member States. Krueger said that bringing as many EU member states on board would send a much stronger message to Iran and third countries about the international community's commitment; he underscored that if targeted measures are blocked by EU member states, Germany is still committed to implementing such measures.

SYRIA

113. (C) Middle East Task Force Coordinator Doelger and Syria/Lebanon Desk Officer Bantle asked for information on the reported U.S. military action into Syria. Poloff reported that there was nothing further to what had already been reported by the State Department Press Spokesperson. Bantle said that he is aware that questions on the Syrian side exist about the timing of the attack. Bantle expressed concern that the attack could have a negative impact on Syria's growing positive relationship with the Iraqi government. He expressed the hope that Syria would not "overreact" to the air strike. Bantle said that the Syrian regime had invited EU defense attaches to visit the alleged site of the air strike on October 31.

¶14. (C) Regarding reftel points on engagement with Syria, Doelger stressed that recent Syrian actions have sent a positive signal, and that Syria's establishing diplomatic relations with Lebanon is historic and significant. Doelger underlined, however, that regardless of the French, German -- and general EU -- favorable view of engaging with Syria, the EU will not sign the EU-Syria Association Agreement without a clear decision by the EU Council and he did not see this happening in the short term. Doelger also pointed out that the Agreement contains a provision related to political dialogue and that one aspect of this dialogue is human rights. He indicated that human rights could be the first area to be undertaken within this political dialogue.

¶15. (C) Doelger made clear that Germany's interest now is to engage with Syria in order to encourage constructive behavior. He assessed that President Assad wants to move in a positive direction and argued that the Syrian regime does not react well to negative pressure, and that when confronted with it, will behave negatively. He said that a regime that is under external pressure becomes more repressive at home and underlined that the best approach is to encourage Syria with positive inducements.

¶16. (C) Bantle stressed that although Germany views Syrian actions over the past several months as positive, Germany is not naive in its view of Syria -- change will not be a quick process with Syria. He said that the French have moved even further toward engaging with Syria, but that even so President Sarkozy is not naive and expects that Syria continues to take positive steps. Regarding human rights concerns, Bantle assessed that the Damascus court's sentence of the Syrian political dissidents of some 2.5 years was actually "mild" by Syrian standards. Poloff noted that engagement did not always bring the desired results with Syria, since only days after FM Steinmeier's January 2007 meeting in Berlin with Syrian FM Muallem, during which human rights was an issue of discussion, these political dissidents were arrested and imprisoned. In response, Bantle argued that Muallem did not actually make the decision to arrest the dissidents.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

¶17. (C) MFA Near East Desk Officer Sorg said that part of the
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November 3 Gymnich discussion of transatlantic relations would be on how the EU could best contribute to the Middle East peace process and on an approach to engaging the United States on this subject. She said that part of this discussion is in preparation for President Sarkozy's upcoming visit to the United States. Sorg said that the French have very ambitious plans regarding the Middle East, but she assessed that the French approach could meet opposition within the EU. Sorg said MFA favors a growing role for the EU with regard to the Middle East, but noted that the EU should not "make mistakes when offering assistance."

¶18. (C) Sorg said that at the Gymnich and GAERC, the EU would consider revisions to its Middle East action strategy (which FM Steinmeier had presented last year). She said that the EU is aware that it needs to increase its efforts to keep the process alive. She said that security strategy will be a part of this discussion. Sorg said that showing quick progress on the ground on the Palestinian side is still a challenge and assessed that the number of barriers within the West Bank has increased, although the number of check points may have diminished. Sorg presented two long-term issues with regard to the peace process: how to support the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations without harming the process, given the domestic sensitivities on both sides, and what approach should be taken if the Palestinian Authority enters a unity government with Hamas.
Timken Jr